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# Bridging Two Eras: the Autobiography of Emily Newell Blair, 1877-1951

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*Bridging Two Eras: The Autobiography of Emily Newell Blair, 1877–1951*, edited by Virginia Jeans Laas. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1999. xxiv, 382 pp. Chronology, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. $29.95 cloth.

Reviewer Catherine E. Rymph is assistant professor of history at the University of Missouri–Columbia. She is the author of "Republican Women's Clubs and Female Political Culture in Small-Town Iowa, 1928–1938" (*Annals of Iowa*, 1997).

In 1931 former suffragist, Democratic Party activist, journalist, and author of women's fiction Emily Newell Blair began to record the story of her life. Updated and revised several times by Blair and her descendants, the manuscript has only recently made it into print.

Blair was one of the key figures to organize women on behalf of the Democratic Party in the years following woman suffrage, serving as vice-chair of the Democratic National Committee (DNC) from 1922 to 1928. One way Blair differed from her better-remembered colleagues Belle Moskowitz, Molly Dewson, and Eleanor Roosevelt was in her midwestern roots. Indeed, her ability to understand the social and political worlds of both midwestern small towns and Washington, D.C., aided her organizing and informed her political analysis.

Blair devotes almost a third of her memoir to reminiscences of her late nineteenth-century Missouri childhood in the frontier towns of Joplin and Carthage, to the history and social life of those towns, and to her early married life. This material will be of most use to readers interested in local history. Blair's narrative reaches out to a wider audience of women's historians as she begins analyzing her adjustment to married life. She describes her efforts to make a home for her husband, Harry, and to take on domestic projects such as designing and sewing clothes for her younger sisters. Anticipating the later analysis of second-wave feminists, Blair notes that someone should "write a book someday on the tasks restless women have invented to occupy their time" (96). Blair had a powerful need to be engaged with the world outside her home and to achieve something on her own. Her insights into her struggles to balance those ambitions with contemporary expectations of women are poignant and engaging.

Blair found the first outlet for those ambitions in 1910 with the publication of her early articles. She entered politics in 1914, when she became a suffragist. Her initial involvement was at the state level in Missouri, but she quickly became a national organizer, working with such notables as Carrie Chapman Catt and Anna Howard Shaw. After the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920, Blair continued her engagement with politics.

Her memoir provides interesting first-hand discussions of an important (and understudied) aspect of women's history—the development of women's partisanship and the entry of women into the political parties. As a prominent suffragist, Blair was courted by both political parties. She discusses the evolution of her own understanding of partisanship, her flirtation with both parties (as well as with nonpartisanship), and her eventual decision, after initially turning down their invitations, to identify with the Democrats. Blair was subsequently elected Missouri's Democratic National Committeewoman in 1921, and was named vice-chair of the DNC in 1922. In that capacity she became the chief organizer of Democratic women, establishing hundreds of Democratic women's clubs across the country.

Although she lived until 1951, Blair ended her autobiography in the 1930s. In a useful introduction, editor Virginia Laas fills in some of Blair's later years. In addition to background on Blair, Laas discusses her method in preparing Blair's drafts for publication. She also places Blair's text within the genre of women's autobiography. Finally, Laas's meticulously researched footnotes supplement Blair's text with background on individuals, events, and places mentioned by the author. More context and analysis from the editor would have been helpful in placing Blair within the history of women and politics. In general, however, Laas has performed an admirable service in bringing the manuscript to press and making available to the public this welcome addition to the literature on American women's political history.

*Hope Restored: How the New Deal Worked in Town and Country*, edited by Bernard Sternsher. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1999. 247 pp. Tables, notes, bibliography. $14.95 paper.

Barbara Berglund, reviewer, is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Michigan. Her dissertation is a multicultural cultural history of nineteenth-century San Francisco.

The articles in *Hope Restored* explore the effects of New Deal policies in 14 different localities around the nation from 1932 to 1941. These years, according to Bernard Sternsher, marked "'an era of hope restored,' in contrast to the period from 1929 to 1932, which, in an earlier anthology, he characterized as "an era of hope lost" (1).

Taken together, the insights of these local histories add depth and nuance to evaluations of the New Deal, which have frequently focused on broad, national analyses. Douglas Fleming's catalog of New Deal policies in Atlanta; Billy Hinson's article about the experiences of men in the Civilian Conservation Corps in Mobile County, Alabama; Roger